



**EDUCATION SANCTIFIED BY PRAYER.**

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# **A SERMON**

PREACHED AT THE

## **CONSECRATION OF ST. MARK'S CHAPEL,**

**In Bishop's College, Lennoxville,**

**JULY 1ST, 1857.**

BY THE

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# SERMON.

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" Those that be planted in the house of the Lord shall flourish in the courts of our God."—PSALM xcii. v. 13.

THE strength and promise, the ornament and glory of a land, are its generous, intelligent and energetic youth. Amongst these, so long as knowledge holds sway over men, so long as intellect guides society, the educated young man must be what captains and standard-bearers are amongst a valiant soldiery. The piety of such young men is *their* strength and promise, their ornament and glory, their shield of faith, their helmet of hope, their breast-plate of righteousness. The strength of piety is in prayer, and habits of devotion are the most beautiful adornment of youth in the sight of angels, and of Him who dwelleth with the lowly and contrite

spirit. And although no habits of prayer and devotion can be thus precious in his eyes, except those which begin in secret ; although the private closet, and the inmost recesses of the heart, must first be consecrated, yet these separate fountains will become an united stream, the stream will seek a wider channel, and they who pray in secret will gather to the assembly of the saints, and have their household altars for the family, and their dedicated temples for the multitude of worshippers. Just between, blending the domestic with the public aspect of daily worship, is the spot where prayer is wont to be made by a company of youths, with their teachers and guardians ; of youths, culled from the flower of the land, and trained up in the refining pursuits of letters, under the exalting influence of true science, within the restraints of an honorable discipline, and in the fear of God ; there are they to be planted in the house of the Lord ; there, to be rooted in that godly instruction, and those sacred customs through which, as long as they live, they may flourish in the courts of our God, till they shall be removed to those rivers where on the banks of the water of life spring up the trees of Paradise.

I do not know that any literal palm or olive was ever permitted to grow within the large

precincts of the temple at Jerusalem. It is not necessary to suppose it, that we may understand the imagery which represents the righteous as planted in the courts of the Lord. The moral growth of the soul is every where easily likened to the growth of a tree. Those who are planted within these courts are those who live in the observance of His ordinances, and the enjoyment of His grace ; and the simple but most weighty import of this saying of the Psalmist is, that the Church of God is the school of godliness ; and that they who learn it there will flourish for ever, in the communion of the saints, and in everlasting peace. The Church of God employs its sacred edifices, and all its usages and services, as means in this education of the soul. Education like this is the business of all our life ; but that education which is the appropriate task of youth should be doubly this, since, while the education of life trains for eternity, the education of youth trains both for this life, and for eternity. Education, sanctified by prayer, is the very signification of the text, and it is the signification of these walls.

To combat the dream of an education that should not educate in the holiest knowledge, the dream of abandoning youth to its unguided fancy till time, experience and ripening thought, should

lead it, sobered perhaps, and sorrowing, to its own dearly purchased conclusions, would be a waste of effort amongst those who either submit themselves to the word of God, or regard the common judgment of mankind. That question was never left undecided for one hour since Abraham was commended as one who would "command his children and his household after him, to keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." It never was treated as a question by any earnest follower of any religion. All men instruct their children, if they love them, in that which they themselves deem true, important and holy. It is only unbelief that can be indifferent, and he who can speak of leaving the young to form their opinions for themselves, might as well propose to leave them to strangle serpents in the cradle, or to aim boyish shafts at the lion and the boar of the forest. The universal voice of reason, speaking through all the transactions of human life, declares that, unless divine revelation, faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and the practice of godliness be less important than all earthly things, they must be parts of every education which shall not be miserably defective, if not fatally false and pernicious.

Even more loudly has the Church spoken ; not only by prescribing one simple but most compre-

hensive and effective summary of the things which a Christian ought to know and believe, and requiring its use in every parish and every household, but even more by placing at the very head of all such instruction, the baptismal state and privilege of every Christian child. The care which brings him in the first days of his existence to the arms of his Saviour, and receives him back, sealed as an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven, and with the charge that, as such, he be taught and trained to lead a godly and a Christian life, is certainly not to be relinquished at any later period of his youthful progress.

There is, too, a striking and in some sense a beautiful tribute which is paid by the worldly and the unbelieving to the sovereignty of religion in the sphere of education as well as in other very sacred parts of the domain of human life. Men, who in their own practice, throw scorn upon the Gospel, yet wish that their sons should not be released from its control. They cannot bear the thought that an irreligious mother should bring up a prayerless offspring ; they would a thousand times rather place a son in the hands of a conscientious clergyman than in those of a philosophical deist. They recognize the impossibility of carrying on high institutions of learning without the predominating influence of some one

communion, or of several. Exceptions to this sentiment may certainly be cited; there have been teachers of the school of Rousseau, and more recent attempts to withdraw religious instruction from its seat; but they have not as yet been numerous enough to shake the strength of this appeal to the common conscience, which only slumbers in the worldly, and is not dead even in the infidel. For, the strange fact is, that a deep persuasion of the truth, of the just claims, and of the divine excellency of the Gospel, may exist in the same bosom which revolts against its dominion, and may compel it to prefer for others, for wives and children, for the public and for society, what, for itself, the desire to live to this world, and to indulge unholy inclinations impels it to disown. Such homage to the necessity of religious education is almost as universal as intelligent reflection or parental love. If it was a positively impious motive, which prompted one who had acquired immense wealth to connect with his endowment of a splendid college for orphans, the condition that no minister of religion should cross its threshold; if he indeed desired to banish all religious teaching from that scene of education, his purpose fell to the ground; the advocates who upheld the legality of the gift disclaimed the real execution of the design; the

place of Christian ministers was taken, as far as might be, by Christian laymen ; the letter was observed, while the spirit was evaded, and all philanthropy exulted at the defeat of an attempt so odious.

Whence come to us, on both sides of yonder line which separates two nations, but not two families of men, whence come to us our institutions of learning ? They are the offspring of those venerable Universities which have been through so many ages monuments of the ancestral piety, and nurseries of the theological erudition, of the Church of England. From those universities, and from their train of subordinate schools, dedicated first to our most holy faith, and next to all human wisdom, and sanctified by the word of God and prayer, issued the founders of all our transatlantic education ; not only those who have upheld the apostolic discipline, but those who, while they relinquished it on this side of the sea, yet transplanted and transmitted the union of sacred and secular knowledge, alike in the wayside school, and in the endowed college. The old puritan divines of New England attempted this, not less than the colonial prelates of this day. The future must decide whether the bond of such union can *ever* be broken with safety to the sacred or secular cause ; but the tes-

timony of the past comes with one single voice. It has not been, however, and it is not now, the mere union of sacred and secular knowledge ; it is the union of intellectual culture and practical godliness. It is education sanctified by prayer ; for prayer is taught by custom, even more than by precept ; and all education, which is indeed religious, is less the communication and elucidation of truth, precious as that may be, than the actual attempt to lead the youthful step into the very way of life, into the exercise of faith, and the practice of righteousness. The beginning, the progress, and the end, are all marked out by this token, " behold, he prayeth." On the knees of our mothers, we learned to call on our Father in heaven, and learned His name and power and love while we thus prayed ; and there has never since been any real advancement towards heaven, except while we have been *doing* that in which we have been instructed. A Christian seminary must be a place, where every facility is afforded, every motive pressed, and every example offered, for the creation and encouragement of the very habits of piety. It is not merely to look for results in years to come, it is to see both the blossom and the fruit already.

Where would you seek and find the best hope of the Church and of the commonwealth ? How

should that youth live on from day to day, who shall be the crown of parental affection, the joy of home, the stay and honor of his private circle, the instrument of divine mercy for boundless good in this sinful world ? If such an one could be discovered by prophetic wisdom, it would be one who, when he woke and when he fell asleep, turned his first and his last thoughts to God, with supplication and with thanksgiving, with hymns and prayers. His knee would be bent at his bedside, before he began the duties of the day ; and when they closed, it would be with humble petitions that every failure might be forgiven, and all the service accepted through the blood of gracious atonement. From the word of God, read in his chamber ; with prayer for the guidance of that Spirit from whom it came, he would gather the counsel that should conduct him safely through all temptations, and the comfort and hope in which he could lie down and take his rest. He would bend himself to his studies, he would mingle with his companions, he would throw himself into his recreations with the simple, childlike, and yet earnest, joyous and manly spirit, which proceeds from habitually beholding, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord Jesus. Through all the riper youth of our Saviour, His perfect holiness drew no such observation from

all around as could have fixed their faith, or prevented the question, “is not this the carpenter?” The completest sanctity which was ever seen on earth, was but little noticed, it excited no wondering admiration, though it found “favour with God and man.” So, then, we might discover him who should be nearest to this example of his Lord, only by his modest blamelessness, only by the fact that we could recall no duty which he had not done. But we are sure that the source of all his strength and purity, his kindness and peace, would be in his daily draughts at that fountain of living waters, of which our Lord has said, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.” We come to God, we come to Christ, and through Christ to the Father, by believing prayer; and if that inward stream of simple devotion be rushing up, from day to day, with all its refreshing and invigorating power, it will give to every toil, study, or pleasure, the lustre of its own sanctity. By the ordinances of Christ and of His Church, such a youth would abide, as a soldier at his standards. “In the Apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in breaking of bread and in prayers,” he would stand fast as yet, if not ignorant of the gusts of opinion and of agitation without the walls of his ecclesiastical home, yet, at least, uninjured by the storm. In

due time, thus nourished, strengthened and armed, he would go out to his own place, wherever it might be assigned by Providence, and fulfil the work which should be given him ; bearing ever with him the cheerful recollections and the established habits of a youth and an education consecrated by prayer.

To form such a character is the office of the Holy Spirit ; but the means of grace are within the power of the Church ; and it is the duty of the Church so to furnish and minister them, so to arrange, assist, instruct and adapt, that all may, in best accordance with the declared will of the Lord, be fitted to be the channels of that Spirit, who is “ the spirit of power and of love, and of a sound mind.” The Church can teach and train her youth to pray, and can look up to God to give them the praying heart. And when, under the benediction and counsel of the Church, institutions of education arise, they ought, by every fit and sacred influence, to invite and urge their inmates to constancy in all the exercises of secret, domestic and public devotion.

For this end, it is even meet that they should be placed where the very scenes of nature should lift the heart to contemplation. Not without cause did the hermits and cloistered men of old, choose for themselves the spots where the heavens

and the earth seemed to be clothed with more than wonted beauty or grandeur. The hill from which the rising and the setting sun may be seen, pouring joyous or pensive light over a broad expanse of sky and sea or land ; the nightly spectacle of a wide horizon and the full arch of stars ; the solemn hush of venerable woods ; the quietness of green pastures and still waters ; the everlasting dash of cataracts ; or sweep of gliding rivers ; the waving plains, white for the harvest ; "the many-twinkling smile of ocean," or its stormy roar ; all have their power to cherish thoughts which rise above all pomp and vanity, all lust and grossness, and find their rest only at the foot-stool of the All-bounteous and Almighty Maker. It is something to dwell, in the bright years of youth, where this great universal temple which God has built for His own praise, so swells before the soul with all the skill of its Divine Architect, so majestically inscribed upon its pillars, its foundations, and its celestial dome. The mind which has been accustomed to meditate and pray in such scenes will bear the same temper into the most narrow and barren ; for the same creative and kind hand is no where hidden, and "heaven and earth," down to its lowliest places, "are full of the Majesty of His glory."

Much more important is the actual provision

of such human facilities, arrangements and encouragements, as may contribute to promote the habit of secret devotion. Oh ! if all mankind could but appreciate the truism, that habit is but continued action, how different would be their estimate of the value of habit in religion from their present too frequent indifference to its growth and sway ! There is a habit of going to Church, and a habit of spending the Sunday at home ; each easily acquired, but soon separating two persons as widely as he who walks in the law of the Lord, is separated from him who is without God in the world. Children have generally, in their degree, the habit of praying in private ; many men have no such habit ; what a gulf was crossed when that habit was left behind ! It is the difference between years of comparative innocence, of awakened conscience, and of, at least, occasional fervour, and years of virtual atheism ; for what is God to him who never prays ! That the habit of living without secret prayer may never begin within the walls which are dedicated to generous education, no possible caution or solicitude ought to be spared by those who watch over the arrangements and administration of seminaries like this. Time and place for retirement, exemption from ungodly example, frequent inculcation of the duty, distribution of

manuals, and the uniform rule and supposition that private prayer and self-examination should have their allotted place as surely as any study, refreshment, or recreation ; so much it is in their power to furnish ; the rest must be with the youthful heart, under the guidance of the Spirit of all grace.

But the house of the Lord in which we desire and pray that the youth of a Christian people may early be planted, the Church of the living God has in its place of public prayer, its best representation and emblem. Here must they be planted who are hereafter to flourish in the courts of our God ; here, in the midst and in the steadfast daily use of those holy services which are the training prescribed by the Church for all her children. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." It ought to invite them, if possible, by its sacred beauty, its speaking form, its inspiring music, and its solemn ceremonial. The very sight and sense of such an assembly of youths with their instructors, gathered before the throne of eternal Wisdom, as brethren, the children of one Father, the enlisted soldiers of one Lord, the heirs of one glorious inheritance, must enkindle a noble sympathy, if it be not crushed down by the suggestions of the basest frivolity. That frivolity, I

know, is ever at hand, ready to pour its despicable ridicule over all which is most serious, and to shed upon bold and proud minds the poison of a wretched fear of scorn, scorn of all moral earnestness, scorn of the altars of their fathers, scorn of the worship and the name of God. The services of this house should bind together in a holy league of mutual strength, those who are willing in their flower of life to seek the favor of God as their portion, and to take up the cross of their Redeemer. Here they will keep the sacred fire alive, as it were from morning till evening, from eve to morn, like the Levites in the ancient temple. Here they will send up their united supplications for their homes, their friends, their rulers, their sovereign, their church, and all their fellow-men. Here, perhaps, they will kneel, side by side, to take the bread and the cup which are the communion of the body and blood of Christ, presenting themselves, their souls and bodies, a living sacrifice. What holy purposes, what resolves transformed by humble self distrust into prayers, what grateful remembrances of signal mercies, what struggles against temptation, what confessions of departure from God and His commandments, what returns to the cleansing blood of the atonement, what victories of the soul, may here be witnessed by no

human eye, but by Him who walketh amongst the candlesticks, and is present wherever two or three are gathered together in His name ! The College chapel should be such a spot ; but I well know what it may be, when profaned, despised, in coldness and dullness, a succession of inanimate performances, often shunned and often barely endured, drags through the year, to be remembered long after either with remorse or with settled hardness of heart. Oh ! let not these consecrated walls send up such a record to the judgment-seat ; and that they may not, (if it be permitted me to address one word of exhortation to all, who here may hold the seat either of the teacher or the learner), let me beseech you to make the services of this house always living services ; as solemn, as interesting, as harmonious, as impressive, as attractive as they can be rendered by the faithful, fervent dispensation of the pure rich Gospel of Christ, by the grand and beautiful ritual of the Church of England in the hands and on the lips of the wise and of the young, and by the best exertion of all your powers, under a glad and grateful dedication of them all to the service of the Lord your Saviour.

So may those who are planted in this house of the Lord flourish in the courts of our God. They will go out, imbued with the truth of

Christ, fixed in their religious convictions, not ashamed, wherever their lot may be cast, to be found on the side of the faith once delivered to the saints. Many will bear with them, already established, the warm piety of heart, the simple trust in the cross, through which they shall overcome the world, and adorn the doctrine of salvation. Some will here draw in the spirit of the watchful pastor, some the zeal of the laborious missionary, some the high and grave wisdom of the Christian scholar, who is to be the light of his generation. Our thoughts go back on such a spot to the youth of Martyn, of Kirke White, of Heber, of Arnold, and of Archer Butler. Our thoughts go out to the villages, along your magnificent rivers, and under the sweep of your high fortress, that ancient key to the western wilderness,—the key which seems now, in the name of Christ, to open to you all which lies beyond as His inheritance, where His Church is to enter in and take possession. Far up the chain of mighty lakes, far up the diverging rivers, on to the coldest regions where the hunter and the Indian meet, on to the western and northern waters, wherever man can dwell; you of the Canadian Church must bear the Gospel and the English liturgy. We bid you God-speed,—we, of the same natural and spiritual descent, as

God shall give us strength, will labour at your side. The event of this day, amongst so many, which thrill the heart of nations, may pass almost unrecorded ; but they who have assisted, by their toils, their gifts or their sacrifices, in raising these walls to the honour of God, and for the service of His Church, in the cause of that education which is sanctified by prayer, may rest in ~~this~~ confidence that they have helped to plant ~~seed~~ which shall flourish in the courts of the Lord when they are gone, and till He shall come with all His saints, to gather in His harvest.

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